

## Section 344

# Armistice and Beyond - 2/4th Battalion

## November 1918 to January 1920

*The 2nd/4th had finished the war at Sepmeries. Continued from section 334.*

### France

#### 11th November 1918 to May 1919

A thanksgiving-service was held on the 12th November 1918

On the 14th the battalion was at Montrecourt, and on the 16th at Cambrai, on their way back from the front, as they were not destined to advance into Germany.

Between the 27th and 29th they were on their way by train via Louches, Douai, Arras, St. Pol and Frevent, arriving at Coutreville early on the 29th and marching thence to Fransu, where they remained till the end of 1918.

On the 6th January 1919 they were presented with their Kings Colours at Fransu by Maj-Gen F J Duncan who was the GOC 61st Division. The Colours were consecrated by the Rev J G Fenn MC assisted by the Rev W L Arrowsmith who had been the battalion's chaplain during the last part of the war.

### Voyage to Egypt

#### May to June 4th 1919

The Battalion was sent to Egypt in May 1919 following rioting there. It left Le Treport for Marseilles and then by ship to Alexandria. It was then about 900 strong but only 12 of the original battalion were left.

They passed through the Strait of Messina on the night of May 31st and held a parade with life belts at 10:00 while off the coast of Sicily. Later they had PT The next day they sighted the coast of crete just before sun-down and the quartermasters called in all serge garments and thick underwear as by now it was getting very warm.

Egypt was sighted at 11:00 on the 4th and they docked at Alexandria at 14:15. The men debarked at 15:00 and marched off to the tramway leaving their packs to be carried on lorries and two platoons of A Coy to unload the rest of the stores.

### Sidi Bishr

#### 4th to 10th June 1919

The tramway took them to Sidi Bishr, about nine miles east of Alexandria on the coast. They arrived at 18:00

and were put to pitching the tents and sorting themselves out. Tea was finally served at 20:30

The following day the camp was re-arranged and the tents re-pitched. The two platoons of A Coy turned up at 14:00 with the stores.

The next few days were spent settling in and getting acclimatised. There was plenty of opportunity for bathing but there were plenty of inspections and Company activities.

### POW Guards

#### 11th to 28th June 1919

On the 11th June the battalion took up their guard duties at the Sidi Bishr POW camp. A and C Coys relieved two coys of the 1/6 Glosters in the morning and C a third Coy in the evening. D Coy relieved the 17th Loyal Indian regiment.

The battalion diarist made the laconic comment on the 14th:-

Very strict guard has to be kept all around the camp especially at night on account of the natives crawling about attempting to steal rifles and kit.

On the 19th the 22nd Manchesters moved out and the Berks moved swiftly to take over their seeming better position nearer the sea. They borrowed Turkish prisoners from the POW camp to move Battalion HQ. The last mid-day meal was served at the old camp and by tea time everything in the new camp was in good order. The next day they fixed up the battalion stores.

The site had wooden sheds surrounded by matting which were reported as being 'very cool and used for dining halls'. The disadvantages of the new site became apparent on the 21st when the wind got up and both the HQ Marquee and the officers tent had to be moved to an area with firmer sand.

For the rest of their stay the companies took their turns on guard duties relieved by the occasional parade and what are simply described as 'Company activities'

On the 25th June 2nd Lt H J Cartwright with eleven other ranks left for Constantinople on escort duties, presumably returning Turkish POWs as they were being re-patriated.

The day after, on the 26th, ten other ranks were sent away for clerical duties at Cairo and Port Said.

## The Peace Treaty

By the 24th June news was arriving of the signing of the Peace Treaty at Versailles. A Peace procession was planned and the Berks were asked to provide a contingent of 24 men to take part.

They paraded at 08:00 on the 25th and began practicing. At last on the 28th another request was received for men to assist with the planned firework display and the peace party was sent off under 2nd Lt Holmes to help.

### 29th June 1919

The next day, the 29th, news finally arrived that the treaty had been signed the previous day and the battalion were given the details of the procession. However the men detailed had already been sent off to help with the fireworks so a second party had to hastily get together.

### 30th June 1919

At 08:30 the new peace party were loaded onto a lorry and conveyed to the assembly point outside the French Consulate in Alexandria.

Besides the contingents from the several British Units in the area the procession contained Armenian Boy Scouts, French Brothers, Catholic Priests and demobilised French soldiers. They set off at 10:00 accompanied by a squadron of airplanes who were performing aerobatics overhead and occasionally coming down to within 20 feet of the ground. The route was taken through Mohammed Ali Square, up the Sharia Sherif Pasha, along Rue Rosette to the Municipal Buildings. The Egyptian Gazette reported:-

The scene in Sherif Pasha will never be forgotten. Flowers rained down upon the heads of the men who had fought so long and stubbornly to save the world from tyranny.. Kisses were showered down from many a packed balcony of Alexandria's most graceful and fair'

At the Municipal Buildings the procession broke up and the lorry took the men back to camp.

That evening almost all the men were given a pass to go into Alexandria, however despite official misgivings the evening passed off without there being any serious disturbance between the troops and the natives.

## Disbandment

### 20th to 24th September 1919

On the 20th September the news arrived that the battalion was to be disbanded on the 25th September.

On the 24th the 2/4 Royal Berks Garrison duties at no 1 and no 4 POW and at the aliens camps were taken over by 1/6 Glosters.

281 ORs were detailed to proceed to Khartoum to join the 1/8th Hampshires the remainder stayed at Alexandria joining the 1/6th Glosters

The following officers also transferred to the 1/6

Glosters:-

Capt R F Schroeder, Capt G S Field Lt HJ Hunter Lt H Wilson Lt EC Kelaray 2Lt HEA Parkhouse

The following officers were transferred to the 1/8 Hampshires:-

Capt NH Wood, Capt CD Hampshire MC, Lt JRM Young Lt RV Raper Lt HJ Cartwright 2Lt Frichardson 2Lt W Carrington MM

The remainder of of the officers were ordered to proceed to transit camp Moustapha and await reposting.

That night there was a special farewell concert by the Battalion concert party in in the church army hut and a special order of the day was issued by the commanding officer

All stores had to be returned.

The next day the party for the 1/8th Hants proceeded to Moustapha by march route.

The Warrant Officers serving at the time were

RSM 11251 J B Lane MM

RQMS 200838 K Eggleton

CSM A coy 203143 F Loveridge

CSM B coy 200980 P Harris

CSM C coy 27341 G E Rowe

CSM D coy 200030 H Hughes

CQMS A coy 43801 CQSM S Back MM

CQMS B coy 7464 CQMS W Girling

CQMS C coy 44504 CQMS SW Wrench

CQMS D coy 201020 E Beckingham

## The Colours come home

The Colours were sent home. leaving Alexandria on Christmas Eve 1919 under the charge of Capt GS Field with Sgt R Monkley, Cpl J Hatch and Ptes F Worsdell, W H Baigent and Harruper.

The party arrived back in Reading on Tuesday 6th Jan 1920 being met at 10:40 by Majors Peter and Sawyer. It was provisionally deposited in Barclays Bank.

## The Reunion

The officers and men of the 2nd/4th held their first reunion in 1921 at the drill hall. The event was covered in the China Dragon:-

There was a good muster at the first re-union dinner of the 2nd/4th Royal Berkshire Regiment held at the Drill Hall, St. Mary's Butts, Reading, on Saturday, January 21st, and it is hoped to make it an annual affair. The proceedings passed off with the greatest success, the officers freely mingling with the men and talking about old times.Col. L. H. Hanbury, C.M.G., V.D., J.P., the first

colonel of the battalion, presided, and the company also included Major Bartram, Major M. Wheeler, Major J. H. Simonds, Capt. G. S. Field, Capt. Lucas, Capt. Whittaker, Capt. Hammond, Lieut. J. A. Brain (Chairman of the Committee), Sir Fisher Dilke (formerly Adjutant), Lieut. Hawkes, Lieut. Gale, Lieut. Biddiscombe, Lieut. Keble, the Rev. F. J. C. Gillmor, and R.S.M. J. Butler.

Amongst the rank and file present were : Rance> Leadbetter, Sergt. Wise, Ptes. Wise, North, Barratt, Robinson, Davey, Masters, D. W. Jerome (Hon. Secretary), Cox, Davies, Watkins, White, Heath, Barrett, Priest, Winifred, G. E. Youde. Ruddle, Westall, A. E, Mooring, W. B. Tutt, K. Eggleton, S.M. Waller, Pilcher, Partlo, Evans, J. A. B. Pocock, Haines, Parkins, Hosier, Parker, Harris, Brown, Clarke, Beasley, V. Knapp, Taylor, Gibbs, Main, Haydon, etc.

Regrets at absence were received from Mr. H. G. Willink, Capt. Loveridge, \_Capt—W-hi.tfield,\_Capt—Bowles,— Lieut. Gillmor, Lieut\_Robinson.Jlieut. And\_Quarter Master C. G. H. Smith, Lieut. Mallam and C.Q.M.S. Browning. Much pleasure was evinced at the receipt of the following postcard from Chelmsford from an old billet mother : " All good wishes and the best of success to the old battalion," Mr. H. G. Willink, whose son was killed while fighting with the battalion, kindly sent cigars for the company.

The Loyal toast being given, the Chairman gave " Fallen Comrades." He said he did not want them to look upon that entirely as a sad toast. Those gallant fellows who made the supreme sacrifice had added to the reputation and the honour of the Royal Berkshire Regiment; they had done their duty far more than those who were spared, and they would be repaid by far higher hands than any honour they could show them.

Major J. H. Simonds proposed the Navy, Army and Reserves Forces. Capt. G. S. Field responded.

Col. Hanbury proposed the 2nd/4th Royal Berks. He told how after he had been taken away to command a Battalion of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment, he met the 2nd/4th, then commanded by Col. Dimmer, V.C., on Vimy Ridge, and how highly the latter spoke of the esprit de corps, not only of the battalion, but of the whole of the Royal Berkshire Regiment. He spoke with confidence of the future, and said he hoped it was only the first of many such gatherings and that it would be even more largely attended next year.

Major M. Wheeler, who replied, said that Col. Hanbury had started the Battalion and been their first C.O. He congratulated Col. Hanbury and the wearers of medals on the good services they had rendered, and asked all present to do what they could for the Territorials.

#### TRIBUTE TO THE OFFICERS.

R.S.M. J. Butler, who was cordially received, paid a high tribute to Col. Hanbury, and spoke of the interest displayed by Mrs. Hanbury in the battalion. When Col. Hanbury went to the Warwicks, Col. Wheeler took command, and they also had very popular officers in Major J. H. Simonds and Mr. Dilke. Col. Hanbury not only secured fine material for the battalion, but also splendid officers ; they proved to be gentlemen. They also had a splendid lot of N.C.O.'s. He hoped that re-union gathering would be repeated another year. R.S.M. Butler described the battalion as "one of the best."

.Capt. Hammond proposed the toast of" The Chairman," which was received with musical honours, and Col. Hanbury replied in fitting terms. [TX01598]

## Sources

China Dragon

War Diary WO95-4651

Egyptian Gazette